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RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0602  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 4133  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 7692  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 5251  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 0539  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI IMMEDIATE 1134  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA IMMEDIATE 0086  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1034  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001026

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SUBJECT: BURMA: TRACK II PROCESS TRASHED

REF: RANGOON 1019 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: DCM Karl Stoltz for Reasons 1.4(b) & (d)

SUBJECT: Burma: Track II Process Trashed

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Advocates of engagement who looked to the unofficial European-led Track II process to reach key members of the GOB and offer concessions to promote further dialogue, were morose at the end of their October 2007 visit to Burma, which occurred shortly after the regime's latest brutal crackdown. The delegation leader, Dr. Paul Paasch of the Frederich Ebert Stiftung (FES), wept publicly at the delegations' final reception in Burma and called the groups' second visit, "a complete disaster." Delegation member Dr. Morton Pederson agreed with Paasch's gloomy assessment and said, "The Track II process is dead." Even before the delegation left Burma, the regime broke its promise not to publicize the visit. The delegation spent most of their visit on tours of GOB Potemkin villages or in meetings with the Information Minister and mid-ranking MOFA officials. Unlike their previous visit, when they met with senior regime leaders and were accompanied by several retired Burmese Ambassadors and senior-level MFA officials, this time they had no fellow travelers and left Burma with little to show for their efforts. End summary.

¶2. (C) Chargi Villarosa received a read-out on the Track II visit from Dr. Christian Hauswedell, former Director of Asia and Pacific Affairs in the German MFA and Morton Pederson in Nay Pyi Taw on Friday, October 5, while awaiting her meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister. Hauswedell and Pederson said the delegation met with Information Minister Kyaw Hsan and director-level MOFA officials, but unlike previous

sessions, they did not meet with any private business people or former Burmese Ambassadors this time, nor with other GOB decision-makers. They spent most of their time in Nay Pyi Taw and on GOB-arranged tours to Lashio and Muse to meet regime-selected ethnic representatives and to tour recently-built dams, factories, schools, and bridges. Contrary to media reports, Gambari did not meet with the delegation in Lashio or Muse; their staged tours in those locations simply followed by a few hours the ones the regime organized for Gambari in the same locations.

13. (C) According to Hauswedell, the German, French, Italian and UK Ambassadors in Rangoon "read the riot act" to the delegation when they arrived in country, criticizing the timing and urging them to deliver tough messages to the regime in the wake of the September crack-down. The EU Ambassadors boycotted all the subsequent Track Two events, including the FES-hosted farewell reception October 6. Hauswedell reported that the delegation's GOB interlocutors felt Than Shwe's announcement of conditional willingness to talk to Aung San Suu Kyi was a major regime concession, but some in the GOB worried that doing so might make them appear weak. The GOB officials acknowledged that the next steps of the roadmap could be opened up to other groups, but claimed to have difficulty choosing among the ethnic minorities. They also expressed concern that even if they opened up the political process, the NLD would still boycott it.

14. (C) Pederson speculated that more responsibility is being put on Acting Prime Minister Thein Sein, because Maung Aye and Than Shwe could not agree on leadership changes. He asked the Charge about Maung Aye's removal from his chairmanship of the Trade Council. He

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asserted that Thura Shwe Mann is being set up as the new handler of foreigners, filling the role filled until 2004 by Khin Nyunt, but agreed that the corrupt reputation of Thura Shwe Mann's and his relatives factored into his unspecified "political problems."

15. (C) Burmese interlocutors asked the Track II delegates for advice on how to educate foreign journalists to report positively about the roadmap process and constitutional referendum, as well as other issues. The Europeans advised the Burmese to do more to get their story out, but apparently did not recommend that the regime allow more foreign journalists enter Burma. The lower level MFA officials with whom the delegation spoke expressed interest in greater exposure to Washington, as opposed to the opportunities they already have within ASEAN. GOB representatives showed the Track II delegation photos of a U.S. Embassy "third secretary" observing a May NLD/88GS march as evidence of America's neo-colonialist intentions. The Europeans advised the GOB to drop such nonsensical claims.

16. (C) At the visitors' farewell reception on October 6, delegation leader and host Paasch concluded his brief speech by stating that, "Our hearts are with the people." When approached shortly afterward by DCM, Paasch wept and said, "I cannot believe what this regime is doing to its people." He called the latest trip a "complete disaster." On October 8, Morton Pederson told emboffs that many among Track Two delegates had pushed to cancel or cut short the visit to Burma after the regime crack-down, but some urged that they take advantage of any window of opportunity to engage the regime. According to Pederson, the regime's distraction over Gambari's nearly simultaneous visit and its unwillingness to address sensitive issues made the trip "worthless." Pederson said he felt the

Track Two process was "probably dead," with most involved unwilling to return for another chance to be manipulated by the regime.

17. (SBU) Adding embarrassment to insult, while the delegation was still in Burma the regime broke its vow to keep the Track Two visit out of the government media. According to Paasch, Track Two organizers insisted before the visit that all meetings be held under Chatham House rules and that delegation members not be named or shown in media coverage. The GOB's response was a two-page feature article in "The New Light of Myanmar" on October 5, with photographs of the delegation visiting schools, farms and engineering projects in Lashio and Muse. The only commitment the regime honored, according to Pederson, was to avoid using the words "Track Two" or linking the delegation to official EU policy. Instead, the GOB referred to the group as a "Frederich Ebert Schtiftung delegation" in all its media coverage.

18. (C) COMMENT: Supporters of the Track Two process bet a lot on hopes that enough concessions might draw the regime into a more useful multilateral dialogue. But Burma's generals are unwilling to concede a single trick. Instead, they again offered staged tours, blocked access to real decision-makers, and exploited the visitors for propaganda purposes. Even those inclined to give the regime the benefit of the doubt left Burma with no illusions this time. We should not rely on participants in the Track Two process to engage effectively with the regime. They are well-meaning but naove academics who now realize that they have been used by the regime and worry about their reputations in academia. A real dialogue in Burma will only be possible when those holding the cards are

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willing to actually come to the table, and stop hiding behind those holding only a dummy hand. End comment.

VILLAROSA